

Carter Okays Disclosure of CIA Budget

Associated Press

CIA Director Stansfield Turner said today that President Carter has ordered the U.S. intelligence community not to oppose publication of the nation's overall intelligence budget, although such disclosure is "not without risk."

But the Navy admiral who took charge of the CIA two months ago objected strongly to any move that would reveal costs of operations of individual agencies or specific intelligence operations.

"The way we spend our intelligence money in this country is one of our necessary secrets," Turner told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"At the same time we are a free and open society . . . Some compromise then is necessary between the risks of giving the enemy an unnecessary advantage over us and of protecting the basic openness of our society," Turner said.

"Accordingly, President Carter has directed that I not object to your releasing to the public the single overall budget figure of the U.S. intelligence community."

CALLING EVEN THAT "a major break with tradition," Turner said that to go further would make trends in U.S. intelligence operations obvious to outsiders and "jeopardize the interest of our country more than the additional information would benefit it."

Turner was the leadoff witness as the Senate panel opened two days of hearings on the question of whether all or any part of the nation's intelligence budget should become public. Former CIA chiefs William Colby and Richard Helms also were to appear.

In 40 hours of closed-door meetings over the past several weeks, an intelligence subcommittee has approved, line by line, the budgets of the CIA and all or part of seven other agencies with intelligence missions.

WITH THAT TASK completed, the full panel must decide whether to report the spending authorization bill to the Senate with dollar figures included. To do so would set a precedent for the intelligence budget, historically hidden away in other money bills — primarily the Pentagon's.

In an opening statement, Chairman William D. Hathaway, D-Maine, acknowledged the public debate between those who say intelligence costs should remain secret and those who say it is a moral and constitutional obligation on the part of the government to reveal them.

"I think that none of us should underestimate the importance of the fact that this proceeding is itself being held in public. It means that for the first time — no matter what the ultimate outcome on this question — the Congress has decided that this issue of secrecy must be debated in a public forum," Hathaway said.